

By: [Gina White](#), Science Editor

Women with Menstrual Issues Are Better Athletes

POS and Olympics

Women's menstrual cycles may be painful, but their muscles are not. Polycystic ovary syndrome (POS) seems to make women better athletes, a Swedish research has revealed. POS leads to either no periods at all or irregular periods, but these symptoms are normal in sportive women and are normally associated in them with tough trainings and specific diets. "But in some cases polycystic ovary syndrome may be the cause. This raises male sex hormone levels and may help sufferers in sport," said Magnus Hagmar of the Karolinska Institute. POS may not have outward symptoms at all, but it is connected to decreased fertility and issues like excess body hair and acne. The condition seems to be largely genetic. Hagmar found POS was more common in "elite athletes" preparing for the Olympics, than in the average woman: 37% compared to 20%. POS was also more common in power requiring sports like ice hockey and wrestling, compared to technical sports like archery or curling. The excess percentage could be connected to a slight increases in testosterone, the male hormone, associated with POS. "What we're dealing with is just a tiny increase in levels, which can make it easier for the women to build muscle mass and absorb oxygen. This means that they might have got quicker results from their training and therefore been encouraged to train harder and more often," said Hagmar. The study challenges the conventional opinion connecting eating disorders and heavy training with the loss of periods and a higher brittle bone risk due to the inhibition of female hormones, as no POS athlete ever had weak bones. Others are not convinced that POS could be a main factor of menstrual issues in female athletes. "It's pretty well established that, at least in endurance athletes, such as marathon runners, menstrual disorders are related to the effect of heavy exercise on the pituitary gland. It is possible that in 'power' sports, women who generally have slightly higher levels of testosterone may be better off," Professor Stephen Franks, an expert on reproductive biology from Imperial College London, told BBC News.